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LAY summaries for Cortex articles

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Editorial

LAY SUMMARIES FOR CORTEX ARTICLES

We will henceforth welcome lay summaries for papers published in Cortex. These summaries will be optional, though authors are encouraged to provide them soon after acceptance of their paper. Cortex “Research Ambassadors” will work with the authors to keep these lay summaries brief, clear and interesting. Information about the “Research Ambassadors” programme, STM Digest (available for all Elsevier journals), can be found here: <http://www.elsevier.com/physical-sciences/environmental-science/stm-digest>. All accepted summaries will be published in an open access repository, *STM Digest*. You can see some examples on the STM Digest Mendeley group page: <http://www.mendeley.com/groups/5145641/stm-digest/>. Summaries will be hot-linked from the online version of the paper, and selected summaries will also be used as Press Releases.

Oscar Wilde maintained that “it is a very sad thing that nowadays there is so little useless information”; time went on, he should be happier now. Not all papers published in Cortex will be suited to a lay summary. Submit one only if you have something to say. Before deciding to do so, think carefully about why people outside the circle of experts in your field should care about your findings. If you then decide to write a lay summary of your paper, please consider the points below.

- Identify the key take home message that you want to share.
- Plan your piece. What is your study about? What was known before? What are the pending issues? What did you find? What do we now know that we did not know before?

- Give a title to your summary (but do not try too hard to be smart).
- Avoid waffle, skip tangential points, and unnecessary detail. Oppenheimer (2006) was granted an Ig-Nobel prize for his finding that conciseness is perceived as intelligence: be concise. Aim for no more than 300 words in total, with sentences no longer than 25 words.
- Use quotes from one of the authors about the findings.
- Do not overstate your claims.
- Avoid jargon. Do not use “completely meaningless word(s) used mostly in research proposals to indicate identity with peer-group” (Storr, 1982). If possible, use simple words, for example with the help of engines like this: <http://splasho.com/upgoer5/> which will limit you to ten hundred common words (“thousand” is not in the top ten hundred common words). But remember: simple is not a synonym of simplistic.
- Check grammar and spelling.
- Do not end with “further research is needed” (otherwise you could be accused of plagiarising the Cochrane Collaboration).

This Cortex initiative has two aims: to allow the general public and journalists to access snippets of the good science published here, and to counter the current trend toward press releases that exaggerate the claims made in the original papers (see Sumner et al., 2014). This latter practice may be mainly due to the brownie points scientists get if they engage the public, apparently independently of what they say. To counter this dismal trend, more transparency is required (Goldacre, 2014). We hope that this initiative, by encouraging simple open access summaries, linked directly to the published paper, will increase that transparency.

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